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ABSTRACT

This paper describes Georgia's Reading Challenge, whose goal is to provide a quality after-school reading program for students in grades four through eight with opportunities to improve reading skills and enhance their interest in reading. Sections of the paper describe the goals of the Reading Challenge; general information; responsibilities of the advisory board; operational requirements for the program; student eligibility; program evaluation/assessment; the curriculum of the Georgia Reading Challenge; teacher/paraprofesional qualifications; staff development; parent/school connection; funding; discipline policy; and student attendance policies. A timeline is attached. (RS)

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Georgia's Reading Challenge
An After-School Reading Program
For Grades 4-8

Program Guidelines

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State Superintendent of Schools
Georgia Department of Education
1998

CS 013 553

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Table of Contents

		Page
Purpose		1
I.	Goals	2
II.	General Information	2
III.	Advisory Board	3
IV.	Operational Requirements	3
V.	Eligibility	4
VI.	Program Evaluation/Assessment	4
VII.	Curriculum	5
VIII.	Teacher/Paraprofessional Qualifications	6
IX.	Staff Development	6
X.	Parent/School Connection	7
XI.	Funding	7
XII.	Discipline Policies	8
XIII.	Student Attendance	8
XIV.	Contract Agreement	8

Georgia's

Reading Challenge

An After-School Reading Program for Grades 4-8

Purpose

The purpose of Georgia's Reading Challenge is to provide a quality after-school reading program for students in grades four through eight with opportunities to improve reading skills and enhance their interest in reading.

The Georgia Department of Education is offering to agencies with either public or private affiliations competitive grant funding for after-school reading programs. Certified teachers and support staff assess students and provide individualized and small group instruction. Students are involved in meaningful, reading-related activities geared to their specific needs. Funding supplements existing after-school programs or establishes new ones. All Georgia's Reading Challenge programs are free of charge for those participating.

Georgia's Reading Challenge

I. Goals

The goals of Georgia's Reading Challenge are:

- To increase levels of reading achievement for participating students.
- To improve school attendance of participating students.
- To improve academic performance of participating students.
- To increase participation by students in supervised academic, educational, community service, or other special-focused activities.
- To provide participating students meaningful, enjoyable after-school activities.

II. General Information

A. The Georgia Department of Education (DOE) must receive all applications by 5 p.m. on **August 14, 1998**. Applications must be postmarked no later than August 12, 1998.

B. Applications will be reviewed and rated by an outside evaluation team using the rating sheet included in the application packet. It is possible for each application to earn a total of 150 points through the rating scale. A minimum of 75 points is required for a program to be considered.

C. Applicants will not receive verification from the DOE regarding receipt of the application package. Applicants wanting verification of receipt are encouraged to use a return receipt service provided by the post office or other mail services.

D. It is recommended that applicants form an advisory board prior to writing the grant application and ask for their assistance in preparing the application. An advisory board must be formed after a grant is awarded (see Section III, Advisory Board).

E. The location of the program is determined by the needs of the community and the types of facilities available. A school building, local or civic building, or private facility may be used as long as liability coverage is provided and the building meets all local, state, and federal codes and guidelines for an after-school, child-care facility. Verification of a child-care operating license or exemption letter is required. You may contact the Department of Human Resources at (770) 535-5475 for further information.

F. Organizations will be notified of approval status by September 30, 1998. Funded programs must begin serving students by November 2, 1998.

G. All programs must be free of charge to all participants.

III. Advisory Board

Each after-school program must have an advisory board responsible for setting policies and guaranteeing that Georgia's Reading Challenge guidelines are followed. The Advisory Board will consist of at least seven members selected from school faculties, administrators, parents, and community leaders. The responsibilities of the board include, but are not limited to:

- Becoming aware of all community resources.
- Preparing a detailed outline of the program to be followed during the after-school hours (see Guidelines, Section VII, page 5).
- Approving beginning and ending dates of the program as well as days and times of operation.
- Developing a discipline policy and an attendance policy.
- Meeting a minimum of two times during the program year to discuss program improvement, evaluation, etc.

IV. Georgia's Reading Challenge-Operational Requirements

A. Each Georgia's Reading Challenge program will operate a **minimum** of 130 days. Programs may run longer, but will have to be funded through another source.

B. Programs must operate a **minimum** of three hours per day, or until 6 p.m. Program funding will be approved for a **maximum** of three hours. Programs choosing to operate more than three hours per day will need to supplement the additional hours through another funding source.

C. Programs must operate five days per week.

D. The adult/teacher ratio will be a maximum of 1:20.
(Note: Small group instruction will be 1:10.)

E. No fees will be charged to participants of Georgia's Reading Challenge.

F. After-school programs will be funded for serving a minimum of 20 students and a maximum of 60 students.

G. A child-care operating license or letter of exemption will be required. Licensing information may be obtained through the Department of Human Resources.

H. In the event the after-school program closes, the Department of Education must be notified thirty days in advance. All materials and/or equipment purchased with after-school state funds are the property of the Department of Education and must be returned.

V. Eligibility

A. **All students in grades 4-8 for the 1998-1999 school year are eligible**. No student will be discriminated against because of race, color, creed, sex, national origin, or handicapping conditions.

B. Students must be residents of the state of Georgia or attend Georgia public schools.

C. Provisions must be made for students with disabilities.

D. Students must receive a minimum of four hours of small group instruction in reading each week. Small group size must be at a ratio of ten students to one certified teacher.

VI. Program Evaluation/Assessment

A. Two forms of assessment are required: (1) a norm-referenced test, and (2) periodic informal assessments.

B. Norm-referenced test
Programs are required to assess students with the norm-referenced Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) upon entry and in the spring. Scores may be obtained from the school the student attends.

C. Informal pretest and posttest assessments
Informal pretest and posttest assessments are required of all students entering and exiting the program. Assessment and administration information will be discussed at training sessions held throughout the state in October. These training dates are to be announced at a later time.

D. Records must be kept on a student's attendance, disciplinary referrals, books read, and reading achievement.

E. Georgia's Reading Challenge programs are to be randomly monitored by the DOE staff.

VII. Curriculum

A. The curriculum of all Georgia's Reading Challenge programs includes three basic components.

- A minimum of four hours per week of small group instruction meeting the needs of the student. The student/teacher ratio must be no more than one teacher for every ten children during this small group instruction. Small group instruction must be provided by a certified teacher. Instruction must be geared to the educational needs of the students as determined by the Basic Literacy Test (BLT) and/or the child's classroom teacher at the school. Information about and instructions on the administration of the BLT are to be included in the October training.
- Daily reading instruction using technology to remediate, reinforce, or enrich individual students' reading skills. Software should be research-based.
- A program of academic enrichment, community service, specialized study, etc., which gives students the opportunity to put their reading and writing skills into practical, meaningful use.

B. Students visit, check out, and read books from the public or school library at least once per week. Student logs are kept, recording the number of books each student reads. The after-school reading program should set appropriate goals for students.

C. Reading materials are research-based and proven effective with students.

D. After-school reading programs are motivating and enriching. Students are provided opportunities for recreation and socialization.

VIII. Teacher/Paraprofessional Qualifications

The staff of Georgia's Reading Challenge must meet the following minimum qualifications; however, the advisory board may agree to more specific criteria. It is recommended that all staff have experience in teaching and/or working with children in grades four through eight and in the teaching of reading. All Georgia's Reading Challenge programs must be in compliance with the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.) § 49-5-110 et. seq. that requires a criminal background check to ensure that potential employees have not been convicted of crimes that would invalidate their acceptability for employment.

A. Teachers
- Must be Georgia-certified in either reading, elementary education, early grades, middle school, Special Education Learning Disabilities, or Interrelated.

B. Paraprofessionals
- Must meet Georgia certification for paraprofessionals.
- Must meet standards as established and outlined by the advisory board.

C. Volunteers
- Must meet standards as established and outlined by the advisory board.
- University interns are welcomed.
- Parent volunteers are strongly encouraged.

IX. Staff Development

A. All teachers and paraprofessionals are required to attend a 20-hour staff development training on the teaching of beginning reading and the administration of the Basic Literacy Test. The DOE will offer training in October. Dates are to be sent out at a later time.

B. A maximum of $3000 in grant funds may be used to pay for staff development, travel and expenses, and technical assistance.

C. Agencies are available for providing technical assistance. Staff development funds may be used to contract with these agencies.

X. Parent/School Connection

A. Parents must be informed of student progress and/or of program activities on a monthly basis. Contact may be a written progress report or a face-to-face conference.

B. Classroom teachers of the students participating in Georgia's Reading Challenge programs are to be involved in planning for student programs and informed of student progress on a monthly basis.

XI. Funding

A. After the program is approved, the first installment will be based on the *projected* number of students served plus a start-up cost. Subsequent payments will be reimbursements based on monies actually expended.

B. Funds are used for:
   (1) Salaries for certified teacher(s) and paraprofessional(s).
   (2) Instructional reading materials.
   (3) Transportation. A maximum of $75 annually per student is allowed.
   (4) Operating expenses. A maximum of ten percent of the total grant is allowed.
   (5) Staff development. A maximum of $3000 may be used to pay for training, travel and expenses, and/or contracts for technical assistance.

C. A roster of actual students served, the days of attendance, and the number of hours students were served must be submitted monthly to the DOE.

D. A significant reduction in the number of students served or hours students are served may result in a re-evaluation and adjustment of the monthly installment.

E. Georgia's Reading Challenge programs must provide a minimum 25 percent match of the total grant funds. Programs must include in their budget an explanation of how they will supplement the grant funds with a 25 percent match of in-kind services or through additional funding.

XII. Discipline Policy

A. All Georgia's Reading Challenge programs are to have on file and enforce a discipline policy.

B. Parents must be informed of the discipline policy.

XIII. Student Attendance

A. All Georgia's Reading Challenge programs must have on file and enforce a policy for removing students for excessive tardiness and/or absences.
- A student may be removed from the program if he or she has ten unexcused tardies.
- A student may be removed from the program if he or she has ten unexcused absences.
- Any student removed from the program may be replaced by a student on the waiting list.
- Policies for removing students from the program must meet the approval of the advisory board and be kept on file.

C. Students must attend four hours per week to remain on the roll. If the student chooses to attend only four hours per week, it must be during the small group reading instruction.

XIV. Contract Agreement

Approved program applicants are required to sign a contract, designated by the DOE. A copy of this form may be obtained from the DOE upon request.

Georgia's Reading Challenge Program

TIMELINE

May, 1998 Governor signed budget with appropriation for $10 million for after-school programs with reading components for students in Grades 4-8.

June 3, 1998 Georgia's Reading Challenge announcement and application went out throughout state.

August 14, 1998 Deadline for Georgia's Reading Challenge grant applications.

August 18, 1998 Rating Committee rated applications.

September 10, 1998 Georgia's Reading Challenge grant recipients presented to Georgia State Board of Education.

September 28-October 1, 1998 Training for providers in Decatur, Georgia.

November 2, 1998 Georgia's Reading Challenge providers begin serving students.